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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Yugoslavia: The Hardline ResponseKey Judgments

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The regime's continuing crackdown on dissidents in Belgrade probably reflects the post-Tito leadership's wish to squelch rising criticism of its lack of resolve and competence in managing Yugoslavia's economic crisis. We think that the dissidents are an easy target because they are not a serious threat, even though some hardliners fear that the dissidents might organize a viable political opposition.

Some leaders clearly intend the "no-nonsense" message to have a broader impact. They are warning critical journalists and activist clergy that they may become the next targets of official pressure. In addition, we believe the hardliners may also revive efforts to purge reluctant moderates and other footdraggers within the leadership.

The tough posture, however, has already run into problems as dissidents have tried to fight back and moderates have tried to blunt the campaign. Dissidents are defying official

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prohibitions on their meetings and protesting human rights violations. Some moderates in the leadership have openly questioned the use of force. [redacted]

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We think the new Presidency and cabinet members who came to power in routine personnel changes in mid-May will have to maintain some pressure on dissidents to avoid being labeled as weak. But regime moderates are likely to prevent the crackdown from going any further, largely because they realize a campaign for orthodoxy could ultimately claim them too. They will use the requirement for consensus on all major decisions to thwart hardliners, and will argue that Belgrade cannot afford human rights polemics with the West at a time of financial need. [redacted]

There is, however, still a risk that, with passions running high and political careers in transition, events could turn nasty. This could happen if the leadership believes Yugoslavia's stability is more tenuous than now seems apparent. Some of the more important warning signs of a move in this direction might be demands by the army for a broader crackdown or a concentration of power in the hands of a few hardliners--such as Presidency members Stane Dolanc and Nikola Ljubicic. [redacted]

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Introduction

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After the death of Tito in May 1980, the political atmosphere in Yugoslavia became increasingly relaxed as government critics openly discussed regime shortcomings and dissident intellectuals held private seminars--"flying universities"--on sensitive political issues. A segment of the leadership supported the "new openness" as a key to modernizing the system via free dialogue. Criticism of official corruption and of the party's abuse of power led to calls for reform that rankled hardliners, who tried to silence the critics and stop what they considered an erosion of the party's monopoly on ideology and its control of the system. The hardliners, however, were able to push through only a few acts of suppression because moderates and regional leaders used the requirement for consensus in decision-making to block any serious campaigns against dissidence. [redacted]

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But earlier this spring hardliners scored a major victory. With the economy in crisis and the tide of complaints about the government growing, they successfully struck against a small but annoying group of Serb dissidents. Judging by their speeches, some hardliners are trying to build on this success to push for a reversal of what they consider a trend toward political pluralism. This paper will assess the reasons for the crackdown and analyze the political dynamic that pits dissidents against the authorities and moderates against hardliners in the hierarchy. [redacted]

The Crackdown

On 20 April, federal and municipal police arrested without warning former Vice-President Milovan Djilas and 27 other intellectuals at a private seminar on ethnic problems. Although Djilas and his comrades were released within two days, the police also:

- roughed up four less prominent dissidents;
- reincarcerated five detainees for investigation of political crimes carrying up to ten-year sentences;
- Rearrested and harassed one detainee, a trade union activist, who was later found dead of a supposed "drug overdose" shortly after his release; and
- briefly detained Srdja Popovic, a lawyer internationally recognized for his willingness to defend political prisoners. The US Embassy speculated that Popovic's detention was intended to warn him against trying to

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organize a Yugoslav-wide committee to protest the previous arrests. [redacted]

Despite negative coverage in the Western press and criticism by Western human rights activists, the regime also increased pressure on other critics in Belgrade. The authorities:

- banned the latest issue of an ideological journal Teorija for printing "slandorous" photomontages of Lenin and Marx;
- suspended a journalist from a major Belgrade paper and purged him from the party for arguing that Tito had a supporting role in Stalin's purges in the 1930s;
- cancelled a public meeting of a panel that included members of the Praxis group of philosophy professors at Belgrade University;
- warned that flying university meetings no longer will be tolerated; and
- increased pressure on Politika, a major Belgrade publishing house which controls many of the most daring journals. [redacted]

Zika Radoljovic, a member of the Serb party Presidium, summarized the official mood by warning on 24 April that the authorities would use "all available means" to suppress dissidence. [redacted]

The crackdown may be spreading beyond Belgrade. On 24 April, Kiro Hadzivasilev, a Macedonian representative on the federal party Presidium, demanded stricter controls over "negative messages" on the media throughout the country. He complained that two party plenums in 1983 had failed to heed the advice of Macedonian leaders to rein in outspoken journalists. Since then, the official Yugoslav press has been attacking clerics in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as Serbia for allegedly stirring up nationalism and political opposition. A central committee meeting on ideology on 12 June was scheduled to discuss some of these issues. [redacted]

In late May, Bosnian authorities arrested Vojislav Seselj, a Serb professor at Sarajevo University and one of those detained

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in Belgrade on 20 April. Seselj, on a hunger strike since 12 May, is now hospitalized in Belgrade.\* We agree with Embassy sources who attribute Seselj's arrest to Branko Mikulic, Bosnia's representative on the federal Presidency and a hardliner on internal security issues. [redacted]

The dissidents were slow to recover from their initial arrests but subsequently have undertaken some low key protests to counter the regime's hard line. [redacted]

- An unusual, joint protest is reportedly circulating for signatures among philosophy societies in Belgrade and Zagreb.
- A dissident petition to the Interior Minister demanded a special investigation of the trade union activist's death or the minister's resignation.
- A group of younger dissidents, known as the "Kindergartners," held a meeting on 13 May in Belgrade in defiance of the authorities' new warnings.
- Djilas has granted numerous interviews to foreign journalists in an effort to mobilize Western support. Srdja Popovic, apparently unintimidated, visited the US to gain the help of human rights' activists and plans to return to Yugoslavia to defend Seselj. [redacted]

We suspect dissidents are trying to arrange, as they have in the past, a show of support by the academic community in Belgrade. They may hope for a symbolic student protest before the party plenum and the academic summer recess. [redacted]

#### Why a Crackdown Now?

We think that hardliners persuaded others in the leadership to crack down on the most obvious instances of dissent in order to impress their critics--inside and outside the establishment--that the leadership has the unity and determination to handle the country's political and economic problems. Previous efforts to get tough with regime critics caused top level disagreement as recently as last fall, and ended with nothing more than empty threats. The specific purpose of the crackdown, in our view, is less to suppress dissidents than to warn regional politicians and central committee members to stop blocking proposed measures that

\* According to Yugoslav press commentary, Seselj advocates partitioning Bosnia-Herzegovina between Serbia and Croatia and revoking official recognition of Bosnia's Muslims as a distinct nationality. [redacted]

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would give slightly greater political and economic power to Belgrade. [ ]

Statements of unhappiness over the regime's drift and indecision increased sharply prior to the arrests:

- Hardline party leaders and unsigned editorials complained in early April that party meetings designed to forge unity behind economic reform had repeatedly degenerated into "monologues" and "paper" duels.
- A recent editorial in the semi-official daily Borba charged unnamed Central Committee members with purposely undermining the party's policies.
- President Spiljak gave a gloomy assessment of the country's economic progress in his farewell address to the Parliament on 19 April, and demanded that politicians stop reopening debate on policies already settled after lengthy consultations.
- Prime Minister Planinc, under fire in early April, threatened to resign if Parliament rejected her draft legislation to meet the IMF's performance requirements. She suggested that a "new government" would severely limit parliamentary participation and power sharing with the regions. [ ]

Given the chance of demoralization following such candid self-criticism, the power holders in Belgrade may well have decided that they had to take a stand on some issue. The Serb dissidents provided a convenient target because they had launched some new ventures that allowed hardliners to argue, undoubtedly with conviction, that the dissidents were trying to organize a permanent political opposition. The Serb dissidents' new tactics included:

- Attempted collaboration between older dissidents, the

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\* The regime crackdown apparently caught the dissidents in the midst of a tactical shift that is not accepted by all Serb dissidents. Several key leaders, including the writer Dobrica Cosic, refused to attend the seminar. Moreover, the Serbian nationalist focus of the seminar is repugnant to most dissidents elsewhere in the country and may indicate that Djilas and his group are becoming more isolated on the Yugoslav scene. Djilas' effort in 1979-80 to create a consolidated opposition of Serb and Croat dissidents lost support after the arrest of the principal collaborators in Zagreb. Djilas' son subsequently started, and still heads, the "Democratic Alternative, a coalition of emigres in London that reportedly is breaking into factions. [ ]

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- younger "Kindergartners", and workers' advocates like the deceased trade union activist. The desire to preempt a budding coalition may have helped convince regime moderates to go along with the initial arrests.
- Espousal of an openly Serb nationalist program that tested regime tolerance. [redacted]

#### The Interior Ministry's Role

The arrests were easy to implement because in early April the federal Interior Ministry received new authority to intervene in local security matters. The federal police participated in the 20 April detentions and afterwards warned that they will continue to crack down on such "illegal" activities. The internal security officials may be trying behind the scenes to consolidate and expand their influence on the leadership. If so, they probably want to turn the screws as tightly as possible to sustain their political momentum. [redacted]

The dissident crackdown also may reflect renewed assertiveness by Stane Dolanc, the ambitious former Interior Minister (until 15 May) and now Slovenia's representative on the collective federal Presidency. [redacted]

- A Belgrade tabloid reported that Dolanc discussed security tasks with Belgrade police on 20 April, thus suggesting he directed the arrests later that day.
- According to press reports in mid-April, Dolanc was part of a new "inner cabinet"--headed by Prime Minister Planinc and including other key ministers--that privately develops key policy proposals. This group may have been the prime mover in the crackdown. The US Embassy believes Dolanc may continue to play a role in the "inner cabinet" even though he has changed jobs. [redacted]

Dolanc was a contender for power until Tito introduced the collective leadership system in 1978 and seems intent on expanding his political clout. [redacted]

#### Ljubovic and the Serb Factor

The crackdown in Belgrade, although authorized by top [redacted]

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federal leaders, also satisfies some key Serb hardliners. They have long wanted to curb Serb intellectuals and dissidents who have had more freedom than their counterparts in many other Yugoslav regions. The US Embassy suggests that the hardline group around Nikola Ljubovic, previously President of Serbia and now that republic's representative on the federal Presidency, was responsible for the initial arrests. [REDACTED]

The tougher stance toward Serb intellectuals would temporarily undermine Ljubovic's main political rival, Dragoslav Markovic. According to Embassy contacts, Markovic, who is widely perceived as a Serb nationalist, has protected controversial Serb journalists and indirectly encouraged Serbia's expanded authority in federal councils. He has been silent on the April 20 detentions, even though, as head of the LCY Presidium, he should have been speaking out in defense of the action. Markovic may lose prestige if hardliners succeed in muzzling his supporters at the important Politika publishing house. Markovic stands to benefit, however, should the crackdown fizzle. [REDACTED]

#### Continuing Leadership Disagreements?

There is some evidence that moderate leaders disagree with the tougher line, but for the most part they are not speaking out too forcefully. According to the US Embassy:

- Former President Spiljak called in a 19 April speech for Belgrade to deal with domestic "enemies" without resorting to repressive means.
- An editorial appearing in an important Belgrade paper after the April arrests urged that opponents be swayed by arguments, not force.
- The press in several other republics--most noticeably Croatia and Slovenia--has been cool or noncommittal in discussing the arrests in Belgrade. [REDACTED]

We believe that the moderates' low-key response reflects their unwillingness to put further strain on Yugoslavia's collective leadership mechanisms and their realization that the leadership needs at this time to show determination and vigor. The moderates also may not be eager to speak in defense of a cause linked to the widely discredited Djilas.

#### Outlook

Short-term prospects favor a continuing, low-grade war of nerves between the authorities and dissidents. The new State Presidency and cabinet that took office on 15 May probably will



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continue the hard line rhetoric to avoid giving the impression of weakness and will try to use calls for discipline to make regional political and economic powers more responsive to their economic stabilization program. In sum, we think the regime's next steps will be firm but not overly provocative. [ ]

- "Show" trials of major figures--like Djilas--do not seem likely. In fact, hard-line advocacy of such radical options would likely galvanize moderate opposition.
- But some of the dissident "small fry" now under arrest seem destined for jail.
- There are likely to be more official threats against outspoken clerics and journalists. [ ]

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Meanwhile dissidents probably will choose their tactics carefully, trying to mobilize opposition to recent regime actions while avoiding provocative acts that might allow hardline forces to expand their influence. Hotheads might gain influence, as hardline polemics continue, but we believe the various dissident communities are ill-prepared for a major challenge to the regime. Even the feisty Serb group detained on 20 April still lacks adequate popular support, internal unity, and a cohesive strategy. [ ]

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At the same time, we think that divisions in the leadership will obstruct wide-scale repression. Although the moderates may have agreed to the initial crackdown, we believe they can easily manipulate Yugoslavia's cumbersome collective system--particularly its requirement for consensus on all major policy decisions--to impede hardliners' initiatives. We therefore believe that the party plenum on 12 June will produce more tough talk but, like previous sessions, little action. [ ]

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As tensions rise, the hardliners' rhetoric might acquire anti-Western overtones (already reflected in a series of articles in a Belgrade newsweekly). They might respond to Western press and public support of the dissidents by denouncing foreign "meddling" and playing on deep-seated fears of growing Western influence. The growing tendency to blame the faltering economy on tough IMF criteria would play into the hardliners' hands. If so, moderate leaders probably would respond that Yugoslavia is responsible for its own financial difficulties and that continued Western support is crucial if Yugoslavia is to avoid even sharper economic declines. [ ]

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#### An Alternative Outcome

The crackdown could become nastier if the leadership

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collectively comes to believe that its grip on power is much weaker than is now apparent. Such a belief might reflect a calculation that:

- The country's economic and political problems are considerably more acute than the leadership will admit outside of its most private councils.
- Regional opposition to economic stabilization legislation will endanger fulfillment of IMF criteria for continued debt payment relief.
- Dissident intellectuals are forging an organized political opposition to capitalize on popular discontent or even mount a major challenge to the regime before it can restore adequate social discipline.

Such perceptions, if widely held in the state and party presidencies, would soon be evident, perhaps as early as the 12 June plenum. In this event, we would expect:

- The military hierarchy, which stopped its public criticism of the regime six months ago and has so far not commented on the current crackdown, to press the civilians to intensify the "discipline and order" campaign. The generals' would thereby bolster the hardliners' influence in their struggle against leading moderates and regional power-brokers.
- A clique to be formed in the new collective leadership--perhaps around Dolanc, Mikulic, and Ljubicic--to dominate the regime's inner councils and to seek military support for severe restrictions on debate within in the collective leadership.

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